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On Gadamerian Hermeneutics: Fusions of Horizons, Dialogue, and Evolution(s) within Culture as Dynamic System of Meaning

Abstract:

Culture as a dynamic system of meaningful relations can naturally accommodate a hermeneutic analysis. In this essay, the notion of Gadamer's hermeneutics as involving interpretable meaning throughout experiential reality permits a natural concordance with an understanding of culture as meaningful. The Gadamerian idea that prejudices inform the horizons that make our experiences intelligible is applied to the view that culture is both a self-enclosed structure that is given by one's horizon and one that continuously points past this horizon in genuine dialogue. Nevertheless, in seeing culture as a coherent system that transcends itself, we are consequently faced with a dilemma regarding the evolution of one's cultural horizons: whether past horizons can survive the creation of novel ones through dialogue. However, this may be resolved through Gadamer's understanding of the functions of sameness and difference within horizontal evolution, and how these functions feature in the distinction between a shared ontological ground and the horizons through which the ground is interpreted. Ultimately, we showcase how it is noncontradictory to suppose that culture is both self- and other-referential.

Keywords:

Gadamer, hermeneutics, culture, interpretation, meaning, horizon, relativism

1. Introduction

It seems uncontroversial to suppose that any significant analysis of culture and cultural meaning would have to at some point mention the potential saliency, or lack thereof, of the philosophical field of hermeneutics to one's analytical efforts and goals. The idea that culture can be read as a text brimming with meaningful interpretability is a natural inference to make from the perspective of a Gadamerian hermeneutics, wherein text and textual interpretation are conceived in broad strokes that render both beholden to the strictures of language: of linguistic frameworks.¹ Indeed if we work with the reasonable premise that within cultural dynamics can be found a potency for meaningful understanding, that in interpreting culture and its meanings we can be rational in our methods, then it should be of no surprise why Gadamer would attribute a close connection between linguistic and cultural traditions (TM, 444): both are meaningful and both can be interpreted for the unearthing of such meaning. Consequently, once we consider that texts and cultures are properly linguistic phenomena within a Gadamerian frame of reference, then the very idea of culture as text should start to look less unpalatable.

The fundamental assumption employed in this paper, for the sake of applying a Gadamerian perspective to an analysis of culture, is that culture can be read as a linguistic phenomenon. This is not to say that culture is *only* a linguistic phenomenon, or can only be interpreted as one, yet we can still motivate this link between culture and language by rationally regarding language as being able to encapsulate culturally symbolic meaning. To do so sufficiently could involve a comprehensive defense of such an encapsulation, but that is outside the scope of this paper. An alternative, yet less comprehensive approach, however, may consist in focusing on the more obvious aspects shared between linguistic and cultural meaning. For this purpose we will be exploring Gadamer's understanding of the culture-language link through his idea of dialogue – we are presupposing here, hopefully uncontroversially, that dialogue is primarily a phenomenon of language – and how this idea addresses some pressing problems concerning cross-cultural dialogue.

There already exists a scholarly body on the relevance of Gadamerian hermeneutics for an analysis of culture.² A recent contribution, by Georgia Warnke, takes issue with the logic behind Gadamer's notion of interpretation and how it may make intelligible a transmission of culture through dialogue.³ In essence, Warnke considers how a Gadamerian dialogue between two people of differing cultures, whereby they share in some cultural bond, manifests a potential dilemma situated around two possible outcomes: either cultural understanding is influenced from within or without my cultural milieu. If from within, then there seems to be no place for interpretive contribution from another of a different culture; if from without, then my own culture ostensibly ceases to influence my trajectory of understanding. In other words, cultural understanding either goes against dialogical influence from another, which saves the cultural bond's identity as informed by my own culture, or against the persistence of my own culture, which modifies the bond's identity as informed by another's culture (or more specifically, by my novel apprehension of another's culture). It is illogical to therefore expect, according to Warnke, that a preexisting bond between myself and another will persist given a genuine dialogue that allows for meaningful contribution from another. Part of the thesis of this paper is that such an outcome is illusory on a careful reading of Gadamer.

1) See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 435ff. Hereafter referred to as TM with page numbers.

2) See Taylor, "Gadamer on the Human Sciences," 126. For multicultural approaches, see George, "The Promise of World Literature," 128; Serequeberhan, "Existence and Heritage," chapter 4; and Vallega, "Exordio," 207. Although the approach taken in this paper can be considered multicultural, inasmuch as cross-cultural dialogue involves people of different cultures, it is not beholden to any one cultural reality for its argument.

3) See Warnke, "Gadamer's Dilemma," 347.

In outline then, this essay briefly sketches out how a philosophical reading of culture would look like in its appropriation of Gadamer's hermeneutics, and why such a reading could be used to understand the notion of cross-cultural dialogue. How are cultures intelligibly characterized from this point of view? Are they self-contained entities, or are they structured to encapsulate more than just their own experiential immediacies? How would this tension between containment and liberation inform the structure of dialogue between different cultures? This essay explores these issues from the standpoint of Gadamer's concepts of horizon, infinite dialogue, and subject matter, from which it becomes clear that dialogue between two different cultural interlocutors can meaningfully allow for genuine contribution from both sides. We first set out to define Gadamer's view of prejudice (Section 2) before tying it in to his understanding of how horizons fuse together (Section 3) and evolve via the interplay between horizontal sameness and difference (Section 4).⁴ We then infer, from this interplay of sameness and difference in horizons, the sense of hermeneutic dialogue as an infinite linguistic act (Section 5) and afterwards discuss potential dilemmas of regarding culture as interminably interpretable in its meanings (Section 6). After responding to these criticisms through a distinction between the subject matter of a text and the horizontal interpretations thereof (Section 7) we then consider how this response still allows Gadamer to avoid relativism in interpretation of cultural meaning through dialogue (Section 8) before concluding the discussion as a whole (Section 9).

2. Gadamer on Prejudice

A quick overview of Gadamer's hermeneutics will immediately portray prejudice as paramount to genuine interpretation and understanding. This is to be opposed to the notion of objective, unprejudiced judgment – of timeless knowledge pertaining to unbiased truth.⁵ Indeed, such judgment, as it pertains to objective meaning asserted in one's interpretation of a text, is anathema to the claim of Gadamerian hermeneutics that there is, according to Anders Odenstedt, “no [objective] meaning which is *unduly* obscured if the interpreter fails to overcome her [prejudices].”⁶ Furthermore, Gadamer even goes so far as to argue that “it is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being.”⁷ Why would he make such a seemingly bold claim? Do prejudices not influence erroneous misunderstandings and misinterpretations? Now, Gadamer does concede, in terms of knowledge of the past, “that controlling the prejudices of our own present to such an extent that we do not misunderstand the witnesses of the past is a valid aim, but obviously such control does not completely fulfill the task of understanding the past and its transmissions.”⁸ Importantly, managing our biases cannot be, for Gadamer, our final regulative norm, because trying to remove one's prejudice for the sake of unbiased knowledge risks denying our very *historicity*, the nature of the past's influences on the present, one of which being the past's influence on our present prejudices.⁹ Indeed, if we regard prejudices and biases as providing distinct perspectives for understanding and interpreting the world, then Gadamer would argue that “the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices ... constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.

4) The spelling of “horizontal” is intentional to elicit a *conceptual* meaning for the term, which will be further elucidated throughout the paper, so it should not be confused with the more *geometric* sense of “horizontal”.

5) See Alon Segev's discussion on the matter in Segev, “The Logic of Question and Answer,” 324.

6) Odenstedt, “Gadamer on the Limits of Reflection,” 46.

7) Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9. See also, TM, 272–3.

8) Ibid., 6. We will focus for now on the relation between the present and the past. We will note the relevance of Gadamer's thought on interpretation between present concerns later on.

9) It is the past that inspires “the prejudices that determine the present.” See Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 11–12.

Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world”;¹⁰ they are, in the literal sense, *prejudgments* that exist prior to any judgment attempting to overcome them.

As such, if present individuals attain prejudices, then past individuals surely must have had them as well. Moreover, present-day interpreters of a past text must also acknowledge that the latter contains discussions about issues that are conditioned by the author’s *past* prejudices, meaning that accurately interpreting some past text must inevitably come to terms with these biases.¹¹ It is in this sense that unbiased, objective knowledge is misguided for Gadamer, since insofar as this knowledge is based on abstraction – as in, abstraction from prejudices – then it would be bereft of specific forms of biased truths, such as those regarded by the past author(s) of a text due to their prejudices. Indeed, these truths that would have been relevant for past concerns are, according to Gadamer, “concealed by abstraction.”¹² Additionally, Odenstedt considers that if abstraction attends the persistence of unreflected prejudices on the part of a present interpreter, then this would elicit a seeming “lack of differentiation between [a past text] and the way in which it is approached [for the unreflective interpreter].”¹³ Gadamer thus considers abstraction as risking a present interpreter’s “alienation” to the past all misguidedly for the sake of “avoiding misunderstandings”;¹⁴ we may as well consider unprejudiced knowledge as its own misunderstanding inasmuch as it neglects an understanding of the prejudices of past voices.¹⁵

This is not to say that a prejudice-recognizing understanding is able to attain the comprehension missing in any moment of abstraction, as prejudices can still allow for imperfect knowledge, whereby committing to any one set of biases obfuscates perspectives informed by other sets. Michael Pickering relates this notion analogously to the interplay between light and dark, for “illumination always casts shadows, and we see only what stands in the light; ... in the light it sheds, any claim to truth conceals what is not seen and so not questioned.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, imperfect grounds for interpretation are still grounds, so even if, according to Pickering, “historical interpretation and understanding can be developed only within ... a matrix of presuppositions and prejudices, ... we should see this as the initial ground of interpretive possibility rather than its denial” (HH, 179).¹⁷

10) Ibid., 9.

11) The discussion of our present knowledge of the past is couched in terms of our interpretation of past texts. What interpretation specifically deals with regarding the text will thus be left purposefully vague until specification becomes relevant to our discussion.

12) Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 11.

13) Odenstedt, “Limits of Reflection,” 45.

14) Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 8.

15) See, Warnke “Gadamer’s Dilemma,” Sec. 3, for a detailed discussion on how unprejudiced knowledge can even misunderstand its own hidden prejudiced nature insofar as we indeed cannot escape at least some mode of historicity. Assuming an inability to escape historicity is neither here nor there for Gadamer; if the purpose of understanding some past text is to be cognizant of the past perspectives used to inform said text, then even if we could abstract from historical influences, the resultant knowledge would be irrelevant for historical accuracy given its denial of prejudices. For Odenstedt, “Historically minded reconstruction [of a text], even if possible to achieve, would not permit interpretations which should be arrived at in *any* context.” Odenstedt, “Limits of Reflection,” 47. This presumably also includes interpretations that are claimed to be true *despite any context*. As such, differentiating between genuine abstraction and abstraction without realizing the persistent influence of one’s past is immaterial for genuine historical knowledge of textual interpretation.

16) Pickering, “History as Horizon,” 177, 179. Cited from here on out as HH.

17) Ben Vedder and Gert-Jan van der Heiden coincide here by claiming that one’s set of prejudices “is the condition of possibility of understanding.” Vedder and van der Heiden, “Provisional Character of Dialogue,” 353.

The question then becomes, are we forever stuck within our initial interpretive grounds, if escaping them via abstraction is not an option?¹⁸

The link with dialogue is pressing here, for it would seem that meaningful dialogue should not even get off the ground if its members cannot perspectively change at all. If we cannot escape our initial prejudices, then how could dialogue be characterized as anything other than mere static exchange of biases? If we desire to construe dialogue as involving the dynamism proper to genuine, meaningful understanding – that which moves us from one epistemic state of affairs to another – then we will need a proper solution to this issue.¹⁹

3. The Fusion of Horizons

Gadamer's solution is through his concept of *horizon*, in which an individual's personal horizon is constituted by the prejudices and predispositions that influence their perspective on things (TM, 300–305). This concept, as a way to evoke our human state of historical situatedness, is partly meant to explain how one can attempt to dialogically engage with prejudices other than those possessed by oneself, and thereby learn to evolve from one's initial horizon. For Gadamer, our expectation of, "readiness to hear," and openness to some new horizon are conditioned by a prior possessed horizon.²⁰ Pickering clarifies this notion by noting that the evolution of our prejudices occurs "through the degree to which [one's horizon] is open to other frames of reference and *reflexive of its own*" (HH, 181–2).²¹ In other words, engaging with new horizons must proceed from recognizing how one's own horizon differs from others. Acknowledging this difference in one's prejudices allows for a dynamic that clarifies a directionality of change, a starting point and a way forward, while the lack of this acknowledgment would consciously preclude recognition from where said change could even begin.²²

When we engage in dialogue, for instance, this recognition of a directionality of change plays a role in affording dialogue its dynamism of genuine understanding. This is because it is through an understanding of how we differ, in our horizons, from others with whom we are dialogically engaged that we attain an initial condition for the capacity to change. In other words, in our exchanges with interlocutors, acknowledging that we may be in dialogue with someone of a different perspective initiates dialogue's power to effect perspectival change within us.

This may seem obvious when considering two present interlocutors, but it is part of a Gadamerian hermeneutics that we can also dialogue with the past. How so? Remember that for Gadamer, the notion of the "text" is meant to be general enough that it can accommodate cultural meaning. However, cultural meaning is an entire temporal state of affairs that is in part informed by the past. Thus, following Gadamer, we ought to be able to dialogue with past texts. It should be obvious that we can converse with another present interlocutor *about* a past text, engaging in dialogue partly through a recognition of how our horizons inform our different

18) It should also be noted that the opposite extreme of unprejudiced knowledge – some form of historical fatalism – is also undesirable, because the temporal distanciation between past and present precludes a perfect transmission of past voices to present perspectives. These two extreme notions of unprejudiced knowledge and historical fatalism are, according to Donald G. Marshall, avoided through Gadamer's use of the concept of "horizon", which is elucidated in Section 3. See, Marshall, "On Dialogue," 125–6.

19) The concept of dialogue is more fully detailed in Sections 4 and 5. Beforehand, we will be using a folk sense of "dialogue" as expressive of communication between the dialoguing members, and which is apprehended by at least one present member. We are purposefully leaving general what constitutes these members for now.

20) Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9. Adam Sandel concurs with Gadamer here, although the former explains this openness to a new horizon as a mindful openness that is contingent upon one possessing a "prior understanding." Sandel, "What is an Open Mind?" 360.

21) My emphasis.

22) See Sandel, "What is an Open Mind?" 367–9.

interpretations of the text; but what about the text itself? Does it engage us in dialogue? It may be easier to see how this could be possible once we note that what counts as a horizon and what counts as a text are not necessarily mutually exclusive realities.

Different horizons capacitate different interpretations of a text, but the text itself, given that it is a product of another horizon, can function similarly as a horizon in terms of sensitizing interpreters to their own prejudices, to the fact that their biased interpretations are not the only ones applicable to the text. Of course, this is not to say that past texts are identical to present horizons; yes, our understanding of such texts can evolve, but this does not mean that the texts themselves evolve in the way that the horizons of present interlocutors can evolve via dialogue. In any case, dialoguing with a past interlocutor (a past text) is functionally similar to dialoguing with a present interlocutor (another person) *from the perspective* of the person engaging with these interlocutors, for that person has the potential to change in both situations. This is in essence how understanding in general is grounded on a model of *dialogical* intelligibility, meaning that textual interpretation, given its generality for Gadamer, is actually derivative of a more general dialogical interpretation. In other words, we should not read textual interpretation as a static phenomenon, for our understanding of a text is based on *horizontal* interaction between the text and a present interpreter – the text speaks to us through its horizontal reality, but this speech is realized through dialogue, in that in my approach of a text my own horizon mediates my apprehension and understanding of it. Yet this is not a one-and-done deal, for similar to the continuity of dialogue between people, I can revisit a text anew for the attainment of novel understanding by allowing different facets of my own horizon to inform novel reinterpretations of the text.²³

This mode of conceptualizing cultural texts, as attaining functional similarity with present horizons, is one way of interpreting Ronald Beiner's comment that;

One not only seeks to fathom the meaning of the text by bringing to bear one's own judgments and commitments, but at the same time one exposes those judgments and commitments to possible revision and transformation by reassessing them in the light of what one has been able to understand of the text with which one is in a dialogical relationship.²⁴

"Revision and transformation" of prejudices is thus contingent upon a recognition of something other than our prejudices – in this case, the otherness of the text. The relevance of said recognition cannot be overstated, because, according to Odenstedt, "prior to this recognition, the individual *coincides with* his context-dependence in the sense of not dividing himself into observer and observed. He thus fails to treat the presuppositions that this dependence contains as distinct entities in their own right."²⁵ It is this dynamic of "revision and transformation" that some commenters on Gadamer regard as the spirit of *negative* experience, of the hermeneutic experience of the *other* in history and our own *otherness*.²⁶

23) Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

24) Beiner, "Gadamer's Philosophy of Dialogue," 150. This revisioning has also been called, by Vedder and van der Heiden, putting prejudices "to the test." Vedder and van der Heiden, "Provisional Character of Dialogue," 353.

25) Odenstedt, "Limits of Reflection," 42–3.

26) Marshall, for example, argues the quite Gadamerian point that the "genuinely experienced person is radically undogmatic and therefore open to new experience." Marshall, "On Dialogue," 130. This sentiment is mirrored in Pickering's "History as Horizon," in that "[e]xperience requires creative dis-illusionment, a running counter to expectation, for its realization." (HH, 184) Pickering's comment is instructive in explaining how the senses of the other can be hermeneutically approached, since "opening ourselves to historical or cultural 'otherness' allows us to see our own prejudices in a new light, allows us to 'other' what is constitutive of us culturally and historically." (HH, 184) See also, Marshall, "On Dialogue," 125; and, TM, 302–6. In short, we must not only "hear the voices of historical otherness, [but also] 'other' our own historicity." (HH, 194) It is through this dual sense of other-orientation that "interpretive judgement" is achieved (HH, 186). Thus, "listening to the voices of history's many others entails a necessary risk to the anticipatory conception of what they have to say – or what they do not say" – about themselves and us (HH, 189).

An important consequence of prejudice re-evaluation through revision and transformation is that whatever new horizon is attained as a result of re-evaluation functions as a novel reinterpretation of the text; this must be, for horizons constitute our perspectives on the world. Nonetheless, this does not entail that, say, some past horizon that we may be trying to understand for a genuine historical knowledge of a text can be perfectly captured as a present-day perspective. Some take Gadamer as claiming that we cannot perfectly evolve back into some past perspective due to the issue of temporal distancing between the past and present.²⁷ Thus, despite the influence that the past has on our present horizons, given our historicity, this influence is flawed, for a temporal separation always intervenes. Pickering, for instance, interprets this phenomenon of the past's imperfect transmissions as a past tradition's meanings being "historically negotiated" through time, in a way similar to how the meanings of words in a "language" are transferred across generations (HH, 181). Gadamer himself attributes to this phenomenon a name: "historically effected consciousness" (TM, 336ff.).

Our horizons are historically effected, in that when we dialogue with a text, be it a set of cultural symbols or something semantically else, we are similar to it in some sense due to both the horizon and the text being linked through time; yet we are different to it, since time has allowed for *horizontal evolution*. Importantly then, we share with the past an imperfect horizontal continuity, implying that interpretive engagement with the past in dialogue partakes in the phenomena of *sameness* and *difference*.²⁸ Functionally similar as they are in terms of horizons in general, past texts and present interlocutors can be dialogued with, and these phenomena of sameness and difference help resolve troubling issues with dialogue involving non-identical horizons – for example, in cross-cultural dialogue – that of, one, the proper influence of different horizons in horizontal evolution, and two, cultural relativism. First, we must elaborate more on these notions of sameness and difference.

4. The Function of Sameness and Difference in Horizons

Indeed, without the reality of horizontal sameness, every interpretation would be a self-enclosed model incorrigibly separated from other interpretations and past horizons, and we would thus be in the throes of a rampant relativism, which Gadamer vehemently rejects;²⁹ and without the reality of horizontal difference, it would be impossible to have novel reinterpretations of texts, for the otherwise different horizons that could be possibly attained through prejudiced re-evaluation would simply converge on the singular one of the past. This understanding of sameness and difference is corroborated by Joel Weinsheimer when he argues that

The crux of Gadamer's hermeneutics, likewise, consists in reconciling the unity of meaning [in sameness] with the multiplicity of understandings [in difference]. For [Gadamer], interpretation constitutes the site of this reconciliation, where the distinction between the one and the many is superseded... [Hence,] [s]ameness and difference are indivisible in Gadamer's hermeneutics, and neither can be suppressed if interpretation is to be

27) Beiner, for instance, considers Gadamer as "never appeal[ing] to knowledge of being perfectly understood." This is because "mutual understanding is an *aspiration*." Beiner, "Gadamer's Philosophy of Dialogue," 156n21. We can read Beiner's as stating that, in terms of knowledge of the past, what can never be perfectly understood is how past individuals thought of certain subject matters, meaning that flawless historical knowledge will always remain an aspired-to ideal.

28) Gadamer calls this phenomenon the "polarity of familiarity and strangeness" in hermeneutic understanding. TM, 295.

29) The notion of horizontal sameness precluding hermeneutic relativism is one way of interpreting Gadamer's statement that relativism is denied by "there [being] absolutely no captivity within a language [of interpretation]." Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 16. See also, TM, 371, 467. Here, the language of the present can imperfectly interact with the language of the past for the sake of a more genuine historical understanding. See, Vedder and van der Heiden, "Provisional Character of Dialogue," 355–6; and, Warnke, "Gadamer's Dilemma," 347.

made intelligible... What distinguishes Gadamer's hermeneutics in this regard is that for him interpretation involves the interminable interplay between sameness and difference.³⁰

Essentially, our historicity, concerning interpretation as a historically situated phenomenon, explains horizontal sameness, while our temporality, concerning temporal distancing between past and present, explains horizontal difference. In relation to our notion of horizons conditioning our textual interpretations, sameness and difference are features of horizons, for the historically conditioned truths of texts can only reveal themselves through the horizons with which they are approached (Cf. HH, 178).³¹

According to Odenstedt, it is this interplay between sameness and difference that "permits another view to be taken seriously and to modify one's self-perception."³² Taking another view seriously means recognizing it as an Other, as *different*, while allowing for horizontal modification appeals to horizontal *sameness*, since acknowledging what is the same as one's own permits a genuine goal and direction for growth toward a more genuine historical interpretation. However, the opposite is also valid: taking another view seriously means recognizing it as *similar* to one's own, while allowing for horizontal modification appeals to horizontal *difference*, as understanding the divergence between horizons reveals that novel re-interpretation of a text, in the sense of mere change and not of growth, is at least possible.

The link with dialogue is also pressing. Engaging with a present interlocutor from, for instance, a different culture may entail coming to grips with a different horizon than yours. The notion of horizontal sameness serves a dual function here: one, recognizing the similarities between the perspectives of different interlocutors helps grant the dialogue a common linguistic ground of shared meaning; two, acknowledging the potential for an eventual shared understanding, as a shared textual interpretation, can motivate horizontal evolution through dialogue. Horizontal difference also attains a dual function: one, recognition of difference safeguards against the dialogue becoming mere reiteration of shared themes; two, having different interpretations can build appreciation of novel perspectives about familiar texts once these perspectives have been communicated in dialogue. Furthermore, dialoguing with past interlocutors elicits similar features when engaging with present ones, although here we are engaging with another horizon to inform our interpretation of that horizon itself *as* a past text – in other words, the horizon within which the intelligibility of the text subsists is itself rife with meaning-potent interpretability.³³

Indeed, we may even apply this feature, of dialoguing with a past text by engaging its horizon, to our dialogue with present interlocutors, for inasmuch as their perspectives constitute their horizon, we can converse with these interlocutors in order to better understand them through interpreting their own horizon as text, as consisting of interpretable meaning. In this way, dialogue functions as a dynamic of communication and recognition of similarities and differences between the present interlocutors. In terms of sameness, dialogue aids in the recognition of, and perhaps eventual evolution to, an integration of otherwise non-identical horizons, while horizontal difference precludes this integration's comprehensiveness – after all, our understanding of our own

30) Weinsheimer, "Meaningless Hermeneutics?" 164–5.

31) See also, Weinsheimer, "Meaningless Hermeneutics?" 161; and, Odenstedt, "Limits of Reflection," 40. This is not to say that a temporal distance is traversed in genuine dialogue, For Gadamer is not at all concerned with completely overcoming said distance. As explained later in this section, dialogue with the past never identifies a present horizon with a past one.

32) Odenstedt, "Limits of Reflection," 42. See, also, Vedder and van der Heiden, "Provisional Character of Dialogue," 352.

33) This entails that a past's horizon is always shifting *from the point of view* of present horizons through which past meaning is mediated in dialogue. This perpetual shift may be one way to construe a historical consciousness that is not effected but effective, wherein through dialogue the horizons that have been past-effected also partake in a future-effecting functionality. Other commenters have paid due attention to the significance of this mode of effective consciousness in Gadamer's hermeneutics. See Cheng, "Receptivity and Creativity in Hermeneutics," 38; and Leiviskä, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition," 588–9, 597.

horizon is possibly never identical to another person's understanding of their own horizon. Additionally, we can regard another present interlocutor's horizon as a past text itself in a sense, given its historically effected nature, or how it is not completely removed from the past's transmissions. The relation with horizontal sameness and difference should be obvious here as well: while our present horizons are different from past states of affairs, they still share similarities nonetheless.

This dual characterization of the relation between sameness and difference in view of horizontal integration and temporality is significant because it also helps clarify the link between Gadamer's notions of a "fusion of horizons" and an "infinite dialogue." First, a fusion of horizons, as Pickering explains, occurs via "a critical integration [of the present] with the past" that is dynamic in nature, since a horizon is "a necessary, *but not absolute*, [condition] for enquiry and interpretation" (HH, 187, 192).³⁴ Critical integration can thus be explained, from the above discussion, as integrative in its appeal to horizontal sameness, but also critical in the sense that any evolved present horizon, as a consequence of said integration and allowance of the past's otherness to influence present prejudices, cannot be identical with that of the past. It is this latter sense of horizontal difference that may be motivating Gadamer's notion that, in any interpretation of a text, there is always the possibility that something *else* can be said about the text (Cf. TM, 581).³⁵ Marshall similarly claims that "no one ever has the last word" in an interpretive dialogue between past and present interlocutors.³⁶

This point is significant. If the text can always be reinterpreted to bequeath upon interlocutors, either upon people in dialogue that are engaged with a text or upon one dialoguing with a text, new meaning, then the "common linguistic ground" alluded to above also features in horizontal difference. Here, that a text can always be in dialogue with us is potentiated by the *ontological* bearing of the linguistic ground shared between text and interlocutor(s). This ground is ontological precisely because it is a reality to which genuine dialogue is perpetually wedded. Thus, between dialoguing individuals conditioned by different horizons, horizontal difference can sensitize one to the fact that their own horizon may not grant the final interpretive word, but this sensitization is contingent upon acknowledgement that there is something *else* that permits these different horizons' mediating function for textual interpretation. This something else is the common ground shared in dialogue, and it is not identical to a horizon, for it is precisely what a horizon can evolve in concordance with: an ontological well of perpetual semantic meaning. As such, even in dialogue with a past text, the common linguistic ground shared between a present interlocutor and the text is the capacitating factor for that interlocutor's horizontal evolution – evolution of their understanding of the text through reinterpretation.

5. The Infinite Dialogue in Hermeneutic Understanding

It should thus be simple to connect Gadamer's sense of horizontal fusion, realized through dialogue wedded to a common ground, with an infinite dialogue because, one, fusion is dynamic, and two, Gadamer considers understanding and interpretation to be language-bound to that ground.³⁷ The paramount importance of language for Gadamer is expressed poignantly by Weinsheimer, in that when "speaking we have no awareness of the world distinct from the word, and no awareness of the word distinct from the world."³⁸ Consequently, any act of interpretation applies not only to an understanding of written text, but also to the understanding of

34) My emphasis.

35) See also Vedder and van der Heiden, "Provisional Character of Dialogue," 352–4.

36) Marshall, "On Dialogue," 131.

37) Cf. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 15; and TM, 435ff.

38) Weinsheimer, "Meaningless Hermeneutics?" 162.

spoken text, that is, of general conversation between people, given that language use is involved in both cases. Therefore, language's ubiquity in hermeneutic understanding easily motivates a conception of interpretation that relies predominantly on a dialogical process. It is in this sense that, for Gadamer, interpreting some past text requires entering into dialogue with a past interlocutor, because any genuinely linguistic act culminating in interpretation can afford an interlocutor understanding only through the *dialogical* process of questioning the meaning of a text and endeavoring to find an interpretive answer (Cf. TM, 362ff.).³⁹

Once we then grant that, in dialogue with the past, one cannot perfectly recreate some past horizon, then the possibility of horizontal evolution entails a perpetuity of interpretation, for the notion of horizontal difference allows horizons to evolve in a potentially infinite number of *different* ways – ways that are inexhaustible precisely because the nonidentification of horizon with ground disallows horizons as interpretively *final*. Beiner, for example, reasons that hermeneutic dialogue is potentially infinite due to the fact that “it is unclear how one could *ever* know whether *anyone* had succeeded in penetrating to the [true, unbiased, final interpretation of the text].”⁴⁰ This therefore ensures that interpretive dialogue partakes of the infinity of the linguistic act;⁴¹ this act is moreover necessarily a creative one as well, because if the past cannot be perfectly recreated, then horizontal fusion must involve the manifestation of *novel* horizons, at least insofar as we do desire for our horizons to evolve past prior prejudices. In relation to Gadamer, interpretational perpetuity and creativity in hermeneutic understanding motivates his understanding that the creation of novel horizons potentiates the creation of a “common language” as a result of the fusion of the horizons of the interlocutors engaged in dialogue with each other (TM, 371, 389).⁴²

Moreover, the past two ideas – dialogue as question and answer, and the creation of a common language through horizontal fusion – capture salient facets of cross-cultural dialogue in practice. One, awareness of horizontal difference can compel the initial stage of questioning, while subsequent dialogue attains the requisite reciprocity for seeking out the interpretive answers that can lead to horizontal evolution between both interlocutors. Two, this evolution can elicit horizontal fusion if mutual understanding of the interpretive answers reached occurs, which therefore leads to the abovementioned “common language.” This is because mutually understanding what forms from a dialogical process of interpretation connotes integrating the understanding of both interlocutors along the novel *linguistic* meaning of the answers reached in that dialogue.

This process of evolution, from fusion of horizons to the creation of a new horizon, occurs even in dialogue with past interlocutors, for any novel horizon is really for the present interlocutor to acquire in order to understand the past anew – a past interlocutor cannot consciously evolve their horizons, as has already been implied above. The situation is not as clear when dialogue involves two present interlocutors, though, for if both can enact horizontal evolution, then for both there will be a new horizon. However, would this evolution *always* lead to horizontal fusion? For Gadamer, even in the case when the new horizons are opposing each other, such as in a sustained misunderstanding or disagreement over the interpretive answers reached in dialogue, there

39) See also Marshall, “On Dialogue,” 123; and Segev, “The Logic of Question and Answer,” 324. Indeed, for Pickering, our own prejudices motivate questions we may ask about the past, and only in being open to changing these can we ever hope “to challenge the anticipated answer[s] to the question[s]” in our engagements with other interpreters in dialogue (HH, 192).

40) Beiner, “Gadamer’s Philosophy of Dialogue,” 152.

41) Cf. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 15–6. See also Risser, “In the Shadow of Hegel,” 86ff., for a comparison of the meanings behind the use of “infinite dialogue” between Hegel and Gadamer.

42) See also Beiner, “Gadamer’s Philosophy of Dialogue,” 148–9. Remember, the fusion is a *critical* phenomenon, so the resultant common language does not denote that hitherto dissimilar horizons are now identical; the common language in this case acts more like an interpretive tool than anything so brazen as to deny the reality of historical difference. This is, for instance, the view taken up in Wang, “Incommensurability and Comparative Philosophy,” 579.

is still presupposed within the misunderstanding or disagreement a “deep common accord.”⁴³ This accord is exactly the common ontological/linguistic ground mentioned above that must preexist dialogue for dialogue to even commence at all, whether it leads to the creation of a common language or to deep disagreement. Indeed, a common language is predicated on an already extant common accord/ground, implying both a dialogical continuity between both forms of commonality and that they are simply two sides of the same hermeneutic coin. However, does a lack of interpretive integration in deep disagreement not mean that horizontal fusion has failed? Indeed, a truly “infinite dialogue” should allow for occasions wherein the interlocutors arrive at seemingly irreconcilable differences in the course of their dialogue. This is precisely what Marshall calls the problem of “plural speech” in contrast to a dialogue between two present interlocutors in which horizontal evolution affords a novel horizon that is at least somewhat understandably shared between them.⁴⁴

6. The Problem of Overextending Horizontal Jurisdiction: Stated

Georgia Warnke succinctly outlines the critique in this way: in analyzing horizontal fusion as two interlocutors sharing a bond, she argues that in our “response to the claims of the Other we may revise our views and assumptions or recommit to them [in a novel horizon]. Yet in neither case is it clear that our mutual [bond with the Other] can always survive the experience.”⁴⁵ To specify further, within a dialogue between past and present interlocutors, Warnke considers that the novel horizon attained by one after horizontal fusion cannot but deny any prior bond of historicity between the interlocutors, given that horizontal evolution instantiates as a *change* from the initial conditions set by historical influence.⁴⁶ For Warnke, if a perspective conditions how one experiences the world, and a horizon consists of one’s perspectives, then the notion of bonds, couched in terms of horizons, as allowing for *novel* experiences that go against our perspectives is all but contradictory.⁴⁷

Essentially, as far as this critique goes, any creation of a novel horizon through horizontal fusion must attenuate the significance of the role that our historicity plays in the fusion, if the new horizon does indeed go against the prior perspectives influenced by said historicity.⁴⁸ This is potentially damaging to Gadamer, as we can consider him claiming, from the above discussion, that recognition of the historical Other importantly involves acknowledging our historical bond with it so that we do not lie to ourselves regarding the prejudices we have inherited. Warnke is skeptical about what takes place in acknowledging this bond: she does not consider it rational how one can regard an extant historical bond while also regarding the historical Other; or, more specifically, how one can regard the Other as something that can potentially influence one’s horizon to go against the character of the very bond that conditioned this influence in the first place. This critique also applies to a dialogue between two present interlocutors: in this case, simply consider that both share a bond of historicity with the same general past, if both are of the same culture, or, if not, then they share at least some bond granting grounds upon which a common accord/language can be established for dialogue. The issue here

43) Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 7.

44) Marshall, “On Dialogue,” 138. David Vessey similarly notes that there can be occasions wherein “something with a different horizon ... [can] fall outside our horizon, in which case we can’t understand it.” Vessey, “Fusion of Horizons,” 526.

45) Warnke, “Gadamer’s Dilemma,” 358.

46) See *ibid.*, 363–5.

47) See *ibid.*, 368–9.

48) Additionally, if we assume for the sake of argument that a novel horizon can be birthed from something other than the influence of our historicity, then how can that historicity still persist when we have moved on past its confines to, say, an alternative mode of historicity informing this novel state of affairs?

is whether the horizontal bonds of both interpreters can survive the manifestation of novel horizons that can go against or even break the bonds.

Couched in terms of cultural fecundity, the issue of horizontal persistence in the face of change can be re-contextualized to highlight the problem of claiming that there is a capacity in one's culture to attenuate its own influence. In other words, given that two present interpreters can engage, through their different cultural influences, in dialogue with each other to actualize some newfound cultural horizon of understanding, to what extent then can we validly say that both individuals are still part of their initial cultures? If our bond with some Other – Gadamer's "deep common accord" – is what potentiates dialogue for meaningful evolution in our understandings, then Warnke's dilemma can be stated as follows: inasmuch as we claim that the culture of the Other influences our change, then there seems to be no room for our own culture to act; inasmuch as we claim that our own culture influences our change, then not only does this change have nothing ostensibly to do with a veritable transformation to a different culture, but also that the influence of the Other concerning this change is radically mitigated.

7. The Problem of Overextending Horizontal Jurisdiction: Resolved

Gadamer's answer to this critique is short: "we understand in a *different way, if we understand at all*" (TM, 296). Every bond, regardless if it is between two present interlocutors or between a past and present one, is imperfect, so one cannot help but understand differently from the other in dialogue. Yes, Gadamer does go on about a common accord and language,⁴⁹ yet any sense of commonality between two interlocutors is always present alongside dissimilarity between them, and this dissimilarity is always in relation to said accord as a common ground that is perpetually interpretable. The above critique by Warnke does not pan out, precisely because Gadamer allows for the interplay of *sameness* and *difference*. In other words, if the above critique is meant to convey that any bond cannot lead to nor persist with new experiences if the latter ones necessarily undermine the former bond, then it has not really understood Gadamer's specific sense of horizontal fusion. Let us be more precise.

According to Weinsheimer, Gadamer's use of "fusion," in terms of the dialogue present between an interlocutor and a text's author, "rejects the superiority of the author (and the author's meaning)."⁵⁰ Thus, we can understand Segev when he proclaims that "the heart of the [hermeneutic] dialogue is not one's own subjective state of mind or that of another interlocutor, but rather the subject matter itself," which can be divergently approached from dissimilar horizons.⁵¹ The divergence of approach here deals with horizons that are not privileged in a hierarchical fashion, wherein one interpretation has to be considered the right one above all the others. A hermeneutic that does not appeal to any privileged meanings when it comes to the interpretation of certain subject matters is, for Weinsheimer,

A two- rather than three-dimensional hermeneutics, a hermeneutics without depth, indeed without (real) meanings... [A two-dimensional hermeneutics eliminates] the dualism upon which the whole notion of meaning depends, the dualism that bifurcates the work into meaning and something that is not the meaning, whether the latter is conceived as the author's expression of the meaning (the form) or the reader's expression of the meaning (the interpretation).⁵²

49) See Section 5.

50) Weinsheimer, "Meaningless Hermeneutics?" 159. See also *ibid.*, 159–60; and Odenstedt, "Limits of Reflection," 40, wherein the proper dialogical attitude, for Gadamer, can be portrayed in the following maxim: both interlocutors ought not subordinate themselves to the other's horizon, and *vice versa*, when said horizon is considered as a normative standard for interpretation.

51) Segev, "The Logic of Question and Answer," 325.

52) Weinsheimer, "Meaningless Hermeneutics?" 159–60.

The differentiation between the subject matter of a text, where the interpretable meaning is couched, and the perspective one uses to interpret it is significant here, for perspectives, even opposing ones, do not exclude each other's existence – they can be held together by an interpreter. This differentiation between subject matter and perspective is also the distinction between the common ground shared between horizons and the horizons themselves that act as interpretive media for said ground mentioned in Sections 4 and 5. As such, bonds between interlocutors can certainly allow for divergent and novel experiences, and the above critique fails when one considers that, by this interpretation, a prior bond, couched in terms of horizons, can always survive horizontal evolution. Stated in another fashion, horizontal fusion does not entail complete integration, but it does allow for past horizons to persist *in tandem* with new ones.

In terms of cross-cultural dialogue, it is an explicit understanding of our own horizons that potentiates a recognition of other horizons *as* distinct from ours. Here, dialogue can thus further flesh out what specifically consists in this distinction whenever we endeavor to, one, come to terms with the perspective of another to better understand their interpretation of a text – more specifically, of a text's subject matter – or two, better understand their own horizons more fully as texts with interpretable meaning. In both cases, whatever novel understanding we may effect in us through dialogue would definitely evolve our horizons somewhat, but this does not necessitate the eradication of the previous understanding – we should be able to hold both in our mind, if not at the same time then at least in a capacity wherein we can use them as conceptual tools to aid in understanding.

In terms of cultural influence, the power that one's culture attains to allow for new experiences is a rational function of horizons for Gadamer; the very image of a horizon should already give this away: just like how natural horizons never terminate, cultural horizons – that is, our prejudices and biases informed by the cultural elements with which we have been familiarized – can naturally extend past themselves to accommodate novel meanings. Cultures, from a Gadamerian perspective, are not static systems of fully coherent mono-logical import; they are dynamic and vivacious features of experiential reality, whose meanings always refer to and past themselves. For Gadamer, horizons, for the sake of empowering rational interpretations of text, must be coherent,⁵³ yet they cannot be mono-logically so – they cannot be conceived of as already finalized semantic units (Cf. TM, 454). A horizon, as with any culture, given its being informed by language, attains “a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, that between its being and its presentations of itself” (TM, 470). What is presented are the logical facets of cultural horizons by which understanding can commence, but the being of such horizons are never fully overt to anyone engaged with them.⁵⁴ It is this being that is continuously unearthed whenever interpreters dialogue with each other; it is this being which partially features in the subsequent manifestation of new cultural horizons of understanding from dialogue. In terms of the distinction between a text's subject matter and the horizontal perspective with which it is interpreted, the constant unearthing of a cultural horizon's being affords interpretations of the text that are fuller and more substantial.⁵⁵

In this way, according to Vessey, horizons are “objective features of the conceptual environment that make a subject matter intelligible, not subjective features of the mind of the speakers.”⁵⁶ Therefore, “horizons

53) This is expressed in his sense of the “fore-conception of completeness” as a requirement for logical coherence within horizons (TM, 294). This ultimately translates to coherence between horizons purported to be about a text and between those horizons and the text's subject matter itself, for all apparent contradictions present within these horizontal and textual elements are to be overcome in the ideal conclusion of the infinite dialogue (Cf., TM, 303, 464–9, 535).

54) Leiviskä concurs, in that, as interpreters, we have an “inability to be fully conscious of *all* the ways in which we are preconditioned” by our horizons. Leiviskä, “The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition,” 591.

55) See *ibid.*, 590; also, TM, 361.

56) Vessey, “Fusion of Horizons,” 533.

fuse when an individual realises how the context of the subject matter can be weighted differently to lead to a different interpretation from the one initially arrived at.”⁵⁷ A person can “fuse horizons” by taking up, say, a divergent interpretation of a text’s subject matter to his own to possibly come up with a new interpretation without having to believe that they can no longer acknowledge their original one as extant.⁵⁸ Of course, understanding the subject matter via a divergent interpretation does not necessitate agreement with said interpretation, for one could still have personal commitments to their own horizontal prejudices, prior or evolved – fusing horizons simply requires one to acknowledge how a divergent interpretation can seem agreeable *from the horizon in which it is made manifest* without having to believe in the horizon itself.⁵⁹

Vedder and van der Heiden remark similarly, in that “if the prejudice is presented in an open way the judgment of another is not appropriated, but is taken in its own merits.”⁶⁰ Horizons are thus “objective” tools to work up differing interpretations of some subject matter, and different people can have differing opinions on the relative usefulness of such tools, but the latter would still be present nonetheless as tools aiding in interpretive understanding. Horizontal fusion therefore does not necessitate the persistence of a prior bond in the naïve terms of agreement between interlocutors, because even in disagreement/misunderstanding, the fact that a prior bond had opened both individuals up to novel re-interpretations means that the bond had functioned as required.⁶¹ As such, horizons function, in part, in terms of openness, which does not require the undermining of prior horizons, as they are objective tools and can thus always be taken on their own merits. This also means that how both sides in a dialogue contribute to mutual understanding is through the provision of different interpretive tools, without any one necessarily negating the other.

8. Some Remarks on Rescuing Gadamer from Relativism

When dealing with understanding the meaningfulness of a cultural horizon itself, the above discussion is not meant to imply that anything goes when it comes to interpretive knowledge of some subject matter. While the possibility of novel re-interpretations is always present due to the role that horizontal *difference* plays in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the fact that horizontal *sameness* exists entails that there is still a place for rational judgment. This connotes that, instead of judgments as to how objectively true an interpretation is, Gadamer’s focus can be taken as dealing with practical judgments of how accurate an interpretation is in its representation of *another horizon* as a subject matter for investigation – that is, of characterizing a horizon as a text rife with interpretable meaning.⁶² This focus coincides with his notion of *phronesis* as the most appropriate mode through which come to an interpretive understanding (TM, 309ff).⁶³

57) Ibid., 534.

58) An anonymous reviewer similarly labels horizons as “different standpoints of meaningfulness” that can fuse because of their “occupation of a shared world,” a shared subject matter and linguistic ground.

59) In terms of cross-cultural dialogue, through my interactions with another interlocutor I may come to better understand their horizons, but that does not mean I have to believe or agree with everything they say about it. Moreover, through these interactions I can better understand my own position and become more aware of my own prejudices (see Note 26), at which point I may disagree with them.

60) Vedder and van der Heiden, “Provisional Character of Dialogue,” 353.

61) Vessey similarly states that “the horizon is not the limit of meaning, but that which extends meaning from what is directly given to the whole context in which it is given... Consequently, it draws us away from what is immediately given toward the greater context that provides the meaning.” Vessey, “Fusion of Horizons,” 530.

62) See, HH, 185; also, O’Reilly, “Transcending Gadamer,” 845.

63) See also Kogler, “Dialogue and Community,” 380ff., for a discussion on the normative dimensions of Gadamer’s call towards historical accuracy in interpretation.

Horizontal judgment can thus still be concordant with the ideas of there being “a multiplicity of true interpretations” of a text’s subject matter,⁶⁴ and that each new horizon in which a text is interpreted acts as the “self-presentation” of the text in differently true ways.⁶⁵ This is because, as hinted at above, a horizon is different from a subject matter, from a shared ground: horizons deal with one’s orientations to the world, while one can only say of the subject matter, if we are to consider it as unapproachable without some horizontal context, what a horizon conditions one to say of it. Therefore, multiple interpretations of a text can still claim equal accuracy; it is just that this claim is rescinded once any influence of horizontal prejudices toward understanding is denied – that is, denying the conceptual influence of either your own biases, which both obfuscate and inform apprehension of a text’s subject matter, and/or those of others, which must be acknowledged to dissuade consideration of one’s own horizon as granting the objectively true interpretation of a text.

Importantly, this interpretation of Gadamer’s focus is still in line with his denial of relativism. Even if the notion of truth is stripped off its unbiased objectivity, to be replaced with a mode of truth that only persists *given* a contextualizing horizon, this latter sense of truth would still be provisional in its relevance (Cf. HH, 178–9): truth may be wedded to context, but the fact that the progression of history bequeaths context shifts means that the relevance of truths is never set in stone *for an ever-changing present*.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the vicissitudes of changes in interpretational relevance for accurate understanding of a text’s subject matter permit porousness in the ontology of this change: different horizons can be seen as mutually interdependent regarding the capacity of two interpreters of a text to come to a novel reinterpretation of it. In other words, both members of a dialogue, whether past or present, are needed to enact horizontal evolution and fusion, and these are ontologically porous since interpretive change hinges upon a shared *ontological* ground that can perpetually reinform horizons in their reinterpretation of said ground. This capacity for reinterpretation, actualized in dialogue, allows for two ostensibly distinct horizons to bridge a semantic gap, although not to the point of wholesale conflation, that must therefore be untraversable from the outset in true relativism, wherein the possibility of evolution toward fusion for better understanding of a text’s subject matter is precluded.⁶⁷ In conclusion, if different horizons can accommodate modulations that afford at least partial semantic reconciliation, then relativism is no longer is a worry in Gadamerian hermeneutics.

The link with cross-cultural dialogue should also be rather obvious here. A true relativism would be one wherein horizontal difference obtains without sameness, wherein dialogue would not be characterized in any meaningful way other than as interlocutors perpetually talking past each other; here, the possibility for some form of semantic reconciliation or horizontal fusion would be inextant *as a way of better understanding some text’s subject matter*, for each and every horizon would count as equally capable of providing true interpretations of *any* text whatsoever. Gadamer avoids this worry by situating dialogue within a dynamic of sameness and difference in horizons, wherein dialogue no longer counts solely as some shouting match, but potentially also as the means by which mutual understanding through horizontal fusion is actualized. From the view of a Gadamerian hermeneutics, dialogue stands between the semantic monolith afforded by an appeal just to horizontal sameness and the semantic isolation afforded by an appeal just to horizontal difference. Dialogue, for Gadamer, therefore partakes in an interpretive tension between answers that may already be shared between interlocutors, and answers that can only realistically be approached through a process of questioning.

64) Vedder and van der Heiden, “Provisional Character of Dialogue,” 354.

65) Weinsheimer, “Meaningless Hermeneutics?” 161. See also Odenstedt, “Limits of Reflection,” 40.

66) Vessey relatedly takes horizons as paramount for granting one the ability “to judge the relative significance of objects or facts,” or, alternatively, of the truth claims pertaining to subject matters. Vessey, “Fusion of Horizons,” 532.

67) See Wang, “Incommensurability and Comparative Philosophy,” 564.

9. Conclusion

What we have just been exploring is how a Gadamerian hermeneutics can be appropriated for the analysis of culture and cultural meaning via the notions of horizon as capacitating textual interpretation and dialogue as interpretive engagement with horizons. There is indeed a reasonable way through which culture can be read as text and interpreted in dialogue, if text is taken in a broad sense wherein what becomes interpretable is one's experiential meaning. This argument is bolstered by Gadamer's idea of language as grounding our understanding, as rendering intelligible our very experiences, entailing that text as a linguistic structure can really be ubiquitously applicable to any and all cases in which meaning can be interpreted. In this regard, culture acts as a dynamic system wherein what is given as intelligible to us is conditioned by our historical situatedness, our historicity and the prejudices that it bequeaths onto us within our horizons. These biases inform how we understand the world around us, yet these features of horizons attain a somewhat paradoxical ontology: they refer not just to themselves in a logical way that grants interpretation its coherent structure, but they also refer past themselves, to what Gadamer terms "the unsaid" of every moment of uttering a word, asserting a statement, and making an interpretation (TM, 454).

This dual ontology, far from being a separated dualism, has both aspects – the horizontal given and "the unsaid" of that horizon's ontological ground as subject matter – mutually interpenetrate each other, earning any cultural horizon its speculative unity, its self-transcending *monism*, so to speak (Cf. TM, 469–70). This interpenetration permits individuals of different cultures to not only learn from each other, but to also find some common accord in interpreting a subject matter, since the continuous unearthing of the unsaid of either cultural horizon in dialogue, where every act of interpretation subsists for Gadamer, attains the chance of bringing forth the discovery of a common bond, or *language*, between each interpreter. It is from this perspective that we can understand Gadamer's earnestness in explaining how genuine dialogue occurs, for this is the process whereby authentic knowledge can be gained. This knowledge would be initially both historically conditioned and self-aware of its being so conditioned so as to potentiate the recognition of another interlocutor's horizon as distinct from one's own, all for the sake of having meaningful dialogue that is empowered by this distinction to reach genuine and new understanding through novel horizontal evolution and fusion.

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